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THE MESSAGES OF THE PSALMS

PSALM 46

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| 1. <i>God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.</i> | <i>Elohim is our refuge and stronghold, fully proved as a help in troubles:</i> |
| 2. <i>Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, And though the mountains be moved in the heart of the seas;</i> | <i>Therefore will we not fear, though the earth should change, And though the mountains should sink into the ocean's midst;</i> |
| 3. <i>Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.</i> | <i>Let the waters thereof roar and foam, let the mountains quake at the inso- lence thereof:</i> |
| 4. <i>There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High.</i> | <i>(Jehovah Sabdôth is with us; our sure retreat is Jacob's God.) (His loving kindness is) a river, the arms whereof make glad the city of God, the sanctuary of the Most High.</i> |
| 5. <i>God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.</i> | <i>Elohim is in the midst of her; she tot- ters not; Elohim helps her when the morn ap- pears.</i> |
| 6. <i>The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered his voice, the earth melted.</i> | <i>Nations roar, kingdoms totter: he utters his voice; the earth melts away.</i> |
| 7. <i>The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.</i> | <i>Jehovah Sabdôth is with us; our sure retreat is Jacob's God.</i> |
| 8. <i>Come, behold the works of the Lord, What desolations he hath made in the earth.</i> | <i>Come, behold the works of Jehovah, who appoints such astonishments in the earth,</i> |
| 9. <i>He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariots in the fire.</i> | <i>Who makes wars to cease unto the end of the earth, Who breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in sunder; Who burns the chariot in the fire.</i> |
| 10. <i>Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.</i> | <i>"Give up, and be sure that I am Elohim: I will exalt myself among the nations, I will exalt myself in the earth."</i> |
| 11. <i>The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.</i> | <i>Jehovah Sabdôth is with us; our sure retreat is Jacob's God.</i> |

—Revised Version.

—Canon Cheyne's translation.

This song, like so many in the Psalter, is expressed in terms so general that several periods contend for the honor of producing it; and yet the feeling is all but irresistible that it is written under the immediate impression of a great, and at that time conclusive, victory. Such a burst of confident praise, such a vivid description of the raging of the nations and their discomfiture by Jehovah, is hardly the result of mere meditation on the marvelous deliverance of God, but must have been stimulated by the experience of such a deliverance. The poet who wrote it, one feels, must have seen a proud enemy discomfited—bows broken, spears snapped, chariots in flames, an anxious city miraculously delivered from peril. The psalm betrays close affinities with prophecies in the book of Isaiah, and may have been written to celebrate the deliverance from the army of Sennacherib which produced so stupendous, and in some ways unfortunate (cf. Jer. 7:4), an impression on the Jewish mind.

The sentiment of the Psalms is never vague, yet the language is seldom definite. The power of the Psalter has been confessed by every age of the Christian as well as of the Jewish church; and that power depends largely upon the applicability of its language to situations varying, it may be, in detail and appearance, but essentially the same. The psalmists have the power, which only the greatest lyrists and the deepest thinkers have, of seeing the general in the particular, and, in delineating their own experience, of dropping all that is adventitious, and expressing only the eternal.

This psalm presents us with magnificent confusions and with a no less magnificent order. The first strophe (vss. 1-3), ending originally, in all probability, with the refrain which closes the other two (vss. 7, 11),

Jehovah of hosts is with us,
A high tower to us is the God of Jacob,

shows us a world in confusion—the earth reeling to and fro, the trembling mountains whose roots are in the nether sea, the swelling waters of the mighty ocean. In the second strophe the horror is heightened. The first revealed angry nature; to this the second adds cruel men; the raging seas of the one merge into the blustering worldly kingdoms of the other, ready to assault the stronghold of the city of God. Ready, but not able; for the gentle stream of Zion is

more than a match for the devastating waters of Assyria, and

Jehovah of hosts is with us,
A high tower to us is the God of Jacob.

In a world where all is movement and confusion, Israel stands firm, because her confidence is in Jehovah. "We will not fear." She can look out upon the future with serenity; for the God who has saved her from the terrible Assyrian can save her from any and every foe. So she will not fear, though the heavens should fall, and the great mountains shake to their foundations, and the solid earth on which she stands reel to and fro. We do not wonder at so superb a faith, if it was inspired by the deliverance from the Assyrians under Sennacherib. That deliverance must have convinced the pious hearts of the day that God's grace was a strong and reliable thing, and that there was a river, unseen of mortal eye though it might be, whose streams could make glad the sore-pressed city of God.

The religious genius of this verse is not fully appreciated till we realize how destitute Jerusalem was of anything that could have given birth to such a thought. Ninck, in his book *On Biblical Paths* (p. 90), has, in a striking passage, made this point very plain:

While other celebrated cities owe their significance, power, and splendor pre-eminently to natural conditions—for example, to their commanding situation on streams or seas, to their position in the midst of the paths of commerce, or to the fruitfulness and productivity of the surrounding country—Jerusalem, the most significant and celebrated of all the cities in the world, is distinguished precisely by the absence of these natural advantages. Standing lonely in the wilderness, built upon hard and rocky soil, with no rich pastures, with hardly a field, without a river, indeed with hardly a spring, far from the great paths of commerce, she owes her unique significance and fame to quite other causes than those of the other great cities of the world. She is what she is without a peer, only through the divine world-conquering revelation of which she was the scene, and which, proceeding from her, has penetrated the whole world. She plays no manner of rôle in any other direction whatever. He who has no eye for these facts will be very much disappointed in a journey to Jerusalem.

This is the best commentary on the forty-sixth psalm. The city "without a river" has become the most famous city in the world because of her unseen river, the river of the grace of her God. The desert was never far away; its atmosphere and influence are on many a page of Judean prophecy. There was little or nothing in the land-

scape to suggest the refreshing streams. But to the clear eyes of faith the river was there; it was in their history, in the recent deliverance. The silver line of the river of God can be seen winding its way through the history of men; and sometimes it is so plain that none but the blind can miss it. Well might the members of the ancient Jewish church, with their eyes upon that river, lift up their hearts in this triumphant song; for

Jehovah of hosts is with us,
A high tower to us is the God of Jacob.

There was no mistaking his power to help. His work was thoroughly done; it was there for any to witness who would listen to the poet's summons: "*Come and see* what Jehovah has done." If God is a living God who works in the world, then it is legitimate to expect that some traces of his operation should be visible; and the man who knows history will not be afraid when the challenge comes. He can appeal to experience, "Come and see;" and to that appeal there is no honorable evasion. The psalmist had proof positive of the power of his God. The spears were snapped in two, the bows were broken in pieces, the chariots were burning in the fire; the emblems of a mighty heathenism had been obliterated. Similarly, the power of Jesus and his gospel is attested today by its triumph over heathen religion in its manifold forms. The missionary upon the foreign field, and not less perhaps the minister at home, looking over the indubitable facts of their experience, can confidently adopt the words of this ancient appeal: "Come and see what the Lord has done."

Toward the close Jehovah himself lifts up an awful voice of warning. "Cease your fruitless warfare," he says, "and know that I am God; ye cannot fight successfully against me, or against the people who believe in me and whose cause is mine. It is I who make wars to cease and who bring peace to my people; I am Lord of all. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Then, with a confidence renewed and refreshed by these words of Jehovah, the people once more raise the old shout of praise:

Jehovah of hosts is with us,
A high tower to us is the God of Jacob.

The secret of his success lies in his name, *Jehovah of hosts*. As

master of the hosts, nothing can withstand him. He stills the noise of the sea and the raging of the peoples; he has but to speak, and the earth melts. How pitiful are the armies of the earth, with their brittle swords and frail chariots and mortal men, when matched against the hosts of heaven under the leadership of Jehovah!

In this psalm there is a majestic ring which we miss in the quieter music of the New Testament. There the national note has died away. Here nations rage and storm and foam like the sea; Israel takes her place over against them, and the national pulse quickens. In the New Testament, Israel is no longer a political force. She has to listen to the dictation of the "nations" whom she hates; even the best pay tribute without a murmur; the finer spirits retire into themselves or commune with one another. But there is no nation. When the apostle says, "In all these things *we are more than conquerors*; for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God," the victors are those who are "in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is one of the glories of the Old Testament that it is inspired through and through with a sense of national duty and aspiration. As, in Psalm 67, it is conscious, as a nation, of its mission, so here it is conscious, as a nation, of the triumph of its faith.